



Staff Sgt. Lee Osberry Jr.

Staff Sgt. Shannon Doerr and Staff Sgt. Steve Leduc check personnel information online during 2002's Exercise Foggy Shores on Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. In addition to its usefulness with mission-essential tasks, computer-based communication has also become a key component of maintaining family togetherness during deployments.

AKO officially A-OK for families

By Arthur McQueen

U.S. Army, Europe, Public Affairs

Lack of communication with loved ones is a major contributor to deployment stress, both for the service member sent downrange and the family member who remains at home. The Army is helping to relieve some of that stress with an expansion of Army Knowledge Online's Web site, instant messaging and e-mail system. This service is free of charge.

Family members of service members and Department of Defense civilians can get their own "guest" accounts on AKO and safely communicate with their loved ones, wherever they might be deployed.

Guest accounts require sponsorship from an individual with an active and full AKO account.

Individuals registering for a guest account will need to enter the AKO e-mail address of the sponsoring account holder.

Though the enrollment process is easy, said William Wellever, an information analyst for U.S. Army, Europe, the registration is not immediate.

"An e-mail will be sent to your sponsor requesting authorization for granting your account," Wellever said.

"To approve your request, your sponsor will then need to log into his or her AKO account and log into the sponsor management console located under the 'My Army Portal' section on the AKO homepage. Once your account has been approved, you will be able to log into the AKO portal.

"If you have not received an authorization notification and you are sure that your sponsor has approved your account, you can contact the AKO

To create an AKO guest account:

1. Log onto www.us.army.mil, select "I'm a New User" and complete the registration form.
2. Select the "Next" button next to guest accounts.
3. Complete the box titled "Army Sponsor E-mail Address."
4. Click "Next." You will be assigned your AKO username and will be prompted to create a password. (Note: The password must be a minimum of eight characters, one of which must be a letter and two of which must be numbers or special characters.)
5. Click "Finish."

For assistance with the registration process: 654-3791/civ. 0703-704-3791 or help@us.army.mil.

help desk for further assistance," he added.

Guest accounts, which are valid for 365 days from the date of registration, are not limited to family members.

Medically discharged service members, local national employees, Army volunteers, contractors, retired civilian employees and others are eligible.

For more information visit the AKO Web site at www.us.army.mil.



Staff Sgt. Stan Parker

Senior Airman Gregory Darby shares a moment with Mack, his military working dog, on Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea. While working dogs travel with their human partners, the care of personal pets can be cause for concern during deployments.

'Pet fostering' programs care for critters left behind

By Harry Noyes

Special to the American Forces Press Service

For the service member scurrying to wrap up a thousand details before deploying, pet abandonment is a decision born of desperation and fraught with guilt.

For a bewildered animal, ripped from a secure home and thrust into a terrifying world of shelters – or worse, life as a stray on the streets – abandonment can mark the beginning of a brutal future.

Fortunately, a growing number of Americans – moved by a love of animals and gratitude to their country's defenders – are offering an alternative to this scenario: pet fostering.

These stay-at-home patriots open their homes to the dogs and cats – and sometimes the rats, parrots, iguanas, boa constrictors and tarantulas – of departing soldiers who have no one else to care for their animals.

When the soldier returns, he or she gets to restart life with a beloved family member. The pet is healthy and happy – and the service member is guilt-free.

The trick is getting soldiers and foster caregivers together and making sure that human and animal are a good fit for each other, said Maj. Steven D. Osborn of U.S. Army Veterinary Command at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Osborn recommended beginning the search locally with installation veterinary treatment facilities, which may be familiar with area services.

Service members should check next with local humane societies, animal-control facilities and breed clubs, he said. If that does not turn up a suitable program, then cast a wider net regionally or even nationally.

Several Web sites now exist to provide advice on fostering and to broker services to bring pet owners and foster caregivers together.

These sites do not assume responsibility for the pets. Even if a site matches up pet owners and pets with potential caregivers, the pet owner is responsible for the final decision to work with a particular caregiver.

The pet owner is generally responsible for veterinary bills, special foods and the like. The owner may offer a gratuity for the foster caregiver if he or she wishes to, but most services are set up on the understanding that fostering per se is free of charge to the soldier.

The following are among the sites dedicated to pet fostering:

■ NetPets (www.netpets.org), is a nonprofit service that says it has recruited and screened 5,000 foster caregivers.

■ Feline Rescue (www.felinerescue.net) has a database that helps owners do their own searches for suitable fosterers.

■ The Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org/ace/11822) offers military pet owners a checklist and a sample contract form.

■ 4MilitaryFamilies (www.4militaryfamilies.com/pets.htm) provides information and tips for taking care of pets during foster care or moves.

Noyes is assistant editor of *The Mercury*, the U.S. Army Medical Command newspaper.

For a list of Stuttgart-area pet boarding facilities, contact Army Community Service at 430-7176/civ. 0711-680-7176, or the Stuttgart Veterinary Clinic at 431-2681/civ. 07031-15-681.

Support families of deployed service members with DeCA's 'Gift of Groceries' program

- Purchase a commissary gift certificate online.
- Donate it to one of the following charitable groups:

Air Force Aid Society
Fisher House Foundation
United Services Organization

- Your gift will be given to a military family in need.

For more information:
www.commissaries.com

